The Actuality of Evald Ilyenkov

Carlo Di Mascio

from the book by Carlo Di Mascio, Ilyenkov e la filosofia marxista-leninista. Introduzione a Dialettica leninista e metafisica del positivismo di Evald Ilyenkov, Phasar Edizioni, Firenze, 2024.

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I.

However, our opponents tell us that Lenin's work has also become outdated. Today, science has reached new heights and it is no longer possible to approach problems in Lenin's manner. No, not at all, «*the issue remains just as Lenin posed it in 1908*» [Evald Ilyenkov, *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism. Reflections on Lenin's book: 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism'*].

Ilyenkov committed suicide in 1979, about twelve years before the dissolution of the USSR, a dissolution that he had in fact already largely anticipated in his varied philosophical works. Academic and institutional leaders, intent on dogmatically policing official ideology, greeted his Marxist-Leninist conception with singular hostility. Ilyenkov was in fact a very dangerous opponent because, contrary to what the Western intelligentsia initially believed, he did not aim to downplay Marxism-Leninism at all, but rather to reactivate it critically, showing how « official Soviet-Marxist ideology and theory» had instead strayed incredibly far from the authentic legacy of Marx, Engels and Lenin, mediated, moreover, by a careful Hegelian reading.

Now, for Ilyenkov, this departure was primarily attributable to the de facto abandonment of dialectical materialism, as the «legitimate and inevitable product of the entire latest development of philosophy and social science»[1] - that is, of that scientific method which not only tends to consider a historically determined society as a living organism and not as a simple mechanism to be managed mechanistically from above, but above all opposes any form of subjectivist idealism, being, as Lenin emphasised, «a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intentions, but, rather, on the contrary, determining the will, consciousness and intentions of men.»[2].

All the attention that Ilyenkov, with his text *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*, devotes to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is motivated solely by a strenuous defence of dialectical materialism, considered an indispensable

[1] V. I. Lenin, *Once more on the theory of realization*, in Collected Works, Vol. 4 [1898-April 1901], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 81.
[2] V. I. Lenin, *What the «Friends of the People». Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*, in Collected Works, Vol. 1 [1893-1894], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 166.

philosophical platform for addressing the contradictions of modernity, whereas neo-positivist interference had inexorably thrown Soviet philosophy into a dramatic pre-Marxist and pre-Leninist dimension, completely separated from concrete scientific experience and activity, contributing to the formation of a theory aimed not at overcoming and resolving material and social contradictions but only at managing them, thus subordinating all political and scientific activity to the mere voluntaristic subjectivism of the established order. As Ilyenkov writes, «Lenin distinctly outlined his own positive understanding of the problems placed before philosophy by the grandiose events in all spheres of human life. In economics, politics, science, technology and art, he clearly and categorically formulated the fundamental principles of the resolution of these problems, and outlined the logic of their resolution.»[3].

II.

While in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* Lenin still nurtured the expectation that materialism could lead conscientious scientists towards dialectical materialism, when he optimistically stated that «Modern physics is in travail; it is giving birth to dialectical materialism.»[4], it was in a later work entitled *On the Significance of Militant Materialism* in 1922, after first passing through the *Philosophical Notebooks*, that he insisted on pointing out that «no natural science and no materialism can hold its own in the struggle against the onslaught of bourgeois ideas and the restoration of the bourgeois world outlook unless it stands on solid philosophical ground. […] the natural scientist must be a modern materialist, a conscious adherent of the materialism represented by Marx, i.e., he must be a dialectical materialist.»[5].

It is therefore dialectical materialism, logic, and thinking developed according to precise criteria that are the common hallmarks to be safeguarded and opposed to the reductionism of Machist philosophy which, like official Soviet Marxism, legitimised at a general theoretical level the isolation of scientific knowledge from the aforementioned «spheres of human life», inexorably shaping it in terms of domination and control. At the root of this lies the Leninist critique of the full adoption of the positivist method in Marxism, after its replacement of dialectics, which tends to dissect and destroy the living image of a living society, resulting in the

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[3] E. Ilyenkov, *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism. Reflections on Lenin's book: 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism'*, Transcribed: Andy Blunden, English translation 1982 by New Park Publications, in marxists.org, p. 2 [Ленинская диалектика и метафизика позитивизма. (Размышления над книгой В.И. Ленина «Материализм и эмп ириокритицизм»)], Izdatel'stvo politicheskojj literatury, Politizdat, Mosca, 1980. This text is Ilyenkov's last, written in 1979 and published a year after his death.

[4] V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, in Collected Works, Vol. 14 [1908], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 313.

[5] V. I. Lenin, *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, in Collected Works, Vol. 33 [August 1921-March 1923], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 233.

separation of individuals from each other, but above all the separation of the material from the ideal, with the effect of making the latter appear as a subjective illusion, a strange conceptual aberration, which in reality generates an ideology behind which only class interests are hidden.

For Ilyenkov, the survival of authentic communist and Marxist-Leninist thought required the abandonment of inadequate philosophical codes, from positivist scientism and empiricism to the idealism of praxis. He therefore considered it essential to establish key points for reconstructing a grammar capable, above all, of bringing out the real specificity of dialectical materialism, according to which «the structures of thought are governed by universal laws of nature and history reflected in scientific knowledge - and verified by thousands of years of human practice. This is the point, this is the fundamental difference between Marxist dialectics and Hegelian dialectics and any other dialectics.»[6]. The Dialectical materialism, in other words, does not allow for any concession to voluntarism and/or subjectivism, just as it precludes any possibility of absolutising reality by adapting thought to one's own time.

And we know that such absolutist adaptations and subjectivist prefigurations can occur through theological devices, deriving orders from divine will; naturalistic devices, whereby everything is referred to an immutable nature, but above all empiricist devices, whereby all knowledge is provided exclusively by the reproduction of what is given by sensory experience, so that the only truth is that which is imposed unilaterally[7]. However, a dialectical materialism that is consistently

[6] E. Ilyenkov, *Dialectics and Worldview. 'Materialist Dialectics as the Logic and Methodology of Modern Scientific Knowledge'*, Alma-Ata, 1977 [Э.В. Ильенков, Диалектика и мировоззрение «Материалистическая диалектика как логика и методология современного научного познания». Алма-Ата, 1977, p. 178].

[7] Already in Hegel's discourse, the fundamental flaw of empiricism was to be found in the one-sidedness of analysis. In affirming the importance of analysis as a means of transition «from the immediacy of sensation to thought: those attributes, which the object analysed contains in union, acquire the form of universality by being separated», Hegel warned against deriving exhaustive knowledge of subjects from his findings and then dwelling solely on them. He showed how this point of view led to a distorted conception of them, comparing a range of experiences to a person removing layer after layer from an onion, thus separating, dismantling, analysing and destroying the living and internally unified substance of the fact: «Empiricism therefore labours under a delusion, if it supposes that, while analysing the objects, it leaves them as they were: it really transforms the concrete into an abstract. And as a consequence of this change, the living thing is killed: life can exist only in the concrete and one.» [G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Translated by William Wallace with a Foreword by Andy Blunden, Second edition published by the Marxists Internet Archive, 2013, § 38, p. 165]. For a true understanding of objects in their living, concrete reality, it is necessary instead to rise above, taking into account the results of analysis, to a higher point coinciding with the «unity of opposites». Hegel's indication therefore focuses on the unity of analysis and synthesis in the process of knowledge, thus clarifying the nature of dialectical thinking. Lukács also mentions this in his essay entitled *What is Orthodox Marxism?* in *History & Class Consciousness*: «The blinkered empiricist will of course deny that facts can only become facts within the framework of a system - which will vary with the knowledge desired. He believes that every piece of data from economic life, every statistic, every raw event already constitutes an important fact. In so doing he forgets that however simple an enumeration of 'facts' may be, however lacking in commentary, it already implies an 'interpretation'.», G.

Marxist and Leninist can never start from the subject or from a superordinate entity in order to construct knowledge and reality, since knowledge and reality always correspond to the product of a process that is dialectical and therefore prevents them from being explained by resorting to sensations or subjectively evaluated data, but only by starting from the logical categories on which they are based.

III.

Dialectics, as Ilyenkov has always insisted, is a logic that explores scientific thought, enriching itself with its achievements, but it must do so precisely as logic, remaining such, that is, developing its own proven categories on the basis of these achievements, without replacing them with concepts from other sciences. The categories of dialectics, Ilyenkov continues, have more than two thousand years of history, representing the quintessence of all the grandiose, and also dramatically contradictory, experiences accumulated by humans in the process of knowledge and their practical activity. In them, not only successes but also errors, dialectically connected with the advancement of knowledge, have found philosophical and logical expression. Therefore, «only the history of thought and technology, as well as social struggle, taken as a whole and in its full development, is capable of demonstrating and also refuting their objectivity, that is, their logical-universal meaning. No individual, personal success, however brilliant, in modern natural science can serve as a sufficient criterion of the «correctness» of the definitions of logical categories.»[8].

Now, these essential points, which could never have allowed any kind of "philosophical" circumvention by any academic or party nomenklatura, except by blatantly denying them, are restored by Ilyenkov precisely in light of what Lenin had done with *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* at the beginning of the 20th century. The issues appeared to him to be homogeneous and of the same origin, because just as Lenin had had to fight the attacks promoted by the theories of Bogdanov, who had moved closer to the empirio-criticism of Mach, Avenarius and Berman, as dogmatic and reactionary materialism directed against the natural sciences, in an offensive revival of idealism, whose aim, in the long-term domination of the entire scientific and philosophical production, would have been to expropriate individuals of a real cognitive relationship with nature, thereby preventing them from being able to scientifically transform the material conditions of existence, all through supposed revisions and corrections to be made to dialectical materialism[9] on the basis of a

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Lukács, *History & Class Consciousness*. *Studies in Marxist Dialectic*, Translated by Rodney Livingstone, The Mit Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1971, p. 5.

[8] E. Ilyenkov - M. Rosenthal, *Lenin and the Current Problems of Dialectical Logic*, in *Communist*, 12 (1969) [М.М. Розенталь Э.В. Ильенков, В.И. Ленин и актуальные проблемы диалектической логики «Коммунист», 12 (1969)], pp. 18-19.

[9] cf. V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, op. cit., p. 314 ff. As Werner Krauss observed, «the danger of idealistic temptations was greater in Lenin's time than in Marx and Engels time. In particular, the founders of socialism had to assert their dialectical method against the prevailing vulgar materialism. In Lenin's time, however, the bourgeoisie, having become reactionary, had largely reconnected with pre-Hegelian idealism on a broader front. Hence Lenin's need to emphasise dialectical materialism by

legitimisation provided solely by positive science - thus Ilyenkov, similarly fought against the penetration of positivism into Soviet politics and philosophy, criticising the rejection of dialectics that served only the technocratic project of building "socialism" in the Brezhnev era, the disguised heir to the empirio-criticism denounced by Lenin as the natural metaphysical conclusion of the logic of positivism.

The extraordinary paradox raised by Ilyenkov, of which he himself was a victim, is that in the seventy years or so since the publication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, practically nothing had changed. Lenin criticised positivism from a Marxist point of view, and although his position was formally recognised as the official foundation of Soviet Marxist philosophy, it was nevertheless effectively dismissed, as positivism not only continued to survive unabated, but even prevailed in the political and philosophical community of the Soviet Union. In other words, what Ilyenkov sensationally develops in *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism* is the latent conviction that despite all the celebrations of Lenin, the greatest revolutionary leader of the 20th century, it was not Lenin who won historically, but Bogdanov, whose heir was none other than Stalinism.

IV.

A victory that will actually continue in all its splendour with the resurgence, starting with Stalin, of the so-called *à la Bogdanov* theses, which Dominique Lecourt describes as an «inexhaustible reservoir for the verbally 'left-wing' themes of Stalinist propaganda in which they became constitutive elements. From the voluntarist humanism whose hymn to the 'new man' was intoned in 1935 and later, to become with Stakhanovism the central motif in a grandiose mythology of the working class and technical progress, to the theory of the 'two sciences' which in 1948, at Zhdanov's instigation, became a redoubtable weapon in the Party's hands to close the ranks of intellectuals around it in a moment of crisis…, all these themes are, as will be observed, present as such in Bogdanov's writings, whose unadmitted offspring they are.»[10].

And so, Bogdanov's positivist «gnoseologism», the orientation towards knowledge of the natural sciences and technical-manipulative control of society, proletarian cultures and sciences together with the organised experiences of human labour society, all characterised by a rigorous engineering and technical-specialist spirit, found, starting in the 1960s, a corresponding materialisation in the centrality of technoscience, with quantum physics, cybernetics (the progenitor of artificial intelligence), algorithmic logic, in short, in that neo-positivism now capable of

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highlighting its differences to an excessive degree.», W. Krauss, *Das Ende der bürgerlichen Philosophie*. In ders.: Literaturtheorie, *Philosophie und Politik*. M. Naumann (Hg.), Berlin u.a. 1984, S. 505 (Hervorhebungen: W. Krauss).

[10] D. Lecourt, *Appendix: Bogdanov, Mirror of the Soviet Intelligentsia,* in *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko,* Introduction by Louis Althusser, Translated by Ben Brewster, NLB, London, 1977, p. 143.

directing and organising the entire social body, yet depriving it of any dialectical-materialistic support capable of orienting «scientific thinking toward a concrete analysis of the country's class contradictions»[11], with the consequent impossibility of truly understanding cognitive processes and capitulation in the face of any scientific endeavour.

Here, then, is the indispensability of dialectics as a tool for understanding contradictions, reality, and its cognitive processes. And this is where Ilyenkov's analysis continues to be relevant today. He warned specifically how dialectical materialism, correctly understood, represented a necessary bulwark for understanding the practices of domination that tend towards hegemony, the technological changes in the modern world that seek to capture - in his time with cybernetics and today with artificial intelligence - the social intelligence incorporated into human relationships, and then the achievements of science, wars, economic crises, cultural manipulations, etc., particularly in testing their correspondence to certain class interests, as well as to objectives functional to increasingly sophisticated and not immediately perceptible controls and exploitations.

And dialectics, in the wake of Lenin, - as a scientific method that demands «concrete and comprehensive examination»[12], distinguishes «subjective motives and objective historical conditions»[13], and «studies the inevitable turns, proving that they were inevitable by a detailed study of the process of development in all its concreteness»[14] - in criticizing concepts it always presents the characteristic of having to bend and break them on the empirical testing ground, exploring their inadequacy, because it is only in this way that thought is capable of confronting reality. Each concept is in a given relationship, in a determined connection with all the others. The dependence of all concepts is mutual and without exception. Only in this way does dialectics take on consistency, as the incessant transition of one concept into another, as the relativity and identity of the opposition. Through the affirmation of work and technique, each individual travels the path of knowledge, moving from subjective to objective knowledge. All reality thus becomes rational, but all rational also becomes real, through social work, technology, science.

V.

It is precisely in reviving *Leninist dialectics* and its intrinsic message that Ilyenkov wonders why a way of thinking such as machist, with its neo-positivist followers – decidedly functional to the new demands of modern capitalism, which, on the one hand, aims to replace the concrete with the abstract and, on the other, produces

[11] E. Ilyenkov, *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*, op. cit., p. 23.
[12] V. I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, in Collected Works, Vol. 7 [September 1903 – December 1904], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 371.
[13] V. I. Lenin, *The Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry*, in Collected Works, Vol. 8 [January - July 1905], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 297.
[14] V. I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 409.

shallow subjectivities, servile to its domination and as such incapable of opposition – begins to despise Hegel and Marxist dialectical materialism. It is necessary to insist on this point. Machism goes so far as to support the idea of a relationship between the material and the spiritual, considering the dominance of science, and correlatively of economics - in the sense of an economistic approach as an immoderate cult of hypertrophic development of the productive forces - all the more true the more it is related, as has already been said, to a qualitative decline in reality.

Reality is not denied by machists, Ilyenkov tells us, but its content is devalued in the name of the disappearance of matter, as Lenin spoke of, which is therefore effectively rejected. This has led to a series of political repercussions that have systematically occurred *not only in the Soviet Union*, since freeing oneself from materialism, i.e. from an approach that tends to identify reality with matter, means not only rejecting structural interpretations, forcing one to passively accept «abstractness» considered essential, such as those of an ethnic, national and spiritual nature[15], but also means placing the economic question as a matter to be immediately subordinated to the political, the perfection of which, however, requires a single and exclusive power that does not allow for any pauses or deviations of any kind in the development of the productive forces.

This dimension, *analysed dialectically*, allows us to understand how a dual ideological construct has been maintained, only apparently alternative, since once the processes of modernisation have been idealised, they can be slowed down or accelerated in their excesses or deficiencies, either by referring to the past, through the recovery of roots and popular values, or to the future, through the deification of scientific progress. And it is precisely machism, like its neo-positivist translation, that has idealised the modern. But to achieve this result, it was necessary to reject dialectics, since «in any of its forms, whether Hegelian or Marxist, it is equally unacceptable to a neo-positivist, because dialectics in general claims to know exactly those forms and laws of development that remain the same, whether we are talking about the development of the external world (i.e. nature and society) or the development of thought (knowledge of this world), that is, the forms and laws of development in general, the forms and laws that alone connect the physical world as a whole with the psychic world, without at the same time abolishing the epistemological opposition of these two worlds»[16].

[15] Consider, starting with Stalin, the substantial return to tradition, the valorisation of Russian roots, the love of popular and folk songs, the cult of technology and work, with the consequent derision of classical philosophical ideas in favour of a blindly sacral deference to hierarchies in the perspective of an equally blindly sacral revaluation of organisational and administrative tasks.

[16] E. Ilyenkov, *Dialectics and Worldview // Philosophy and culture*, (1979) [Ильенков Э.В. Диалектика и мировоззрение // Ильенков Э.В. Философия и культура (1979) – М., 1991, pp. 349-350].

It was the rejection of dialectics that produced that inexorable two-faced Janus, so despised by Lenin, which would lead indiscriminately to modernism and anti-modernism, between the productive efficiencies of state capitalist systems and systems aimed at reactivating identity structures by resorting to the myths of the past, as well as to the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary, the latter, in the image of Bogdanov's *Engineer Menni*, very similar, as Ilyenkov writes, to an engineer with whom Lenin had actually dealt «not long before the July Days» and who «had once been a revolutionary, had been in the Social-Democratic movement and even a member of the Bolshevik Party. Now he was full of fear and rage at the turbulent and indomitable workers. "If they were at least like the German workers," he said (he is an educated man and has been abroad), "of course, I understand that the social revolution is, in general, inevitable, but here, when the workers' level has been so reduced by the war ... it is not a revolution, it is an abyss." He was willing to accept the social revolution if history were to lead to it in the peaceful, calm, smooth and precise manner of a German express train pulling into a station. A sedate conductor would open the carriage door and announce: "Social Revolution Station! *Alle aussteigen!* (All change!)".»[17].

VI.

Moreover, it is by virtue of this overall conceptual apparatus that the machist operation denounced by Lenin at the beginning of the twentieth century unfolded, since in aiming to rationalize the progressive specialization of research and the exponential growth of scientific discoveries and paradigms, as well as the process of technological translation of science into the machine system with consequent subsumption of productive forces and science to capital, it was necessary to make the dialectical relationship between what happens at the social level and the development of thought indecipherable, thus preventing us from grasping «the various points, the various aspects of the problem, in application to the specific features of different political and economic conditions.»[18], that is to say «the movement from every aspect, taking into account both the past and the future»[19]. In other words, if one works to abolish the category of social totality, one cannot even begin to think of understanding the effects of exploitation or speaking on behalf of its victims, which implies that one cannot conceive of anything other than exploitation.

It was therefore a question of separating rationality from its practical implementation, that is, of making it impossible to unify human history «also by means of the history

[17] E. Ilyenkov, *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*, op. cit., p. 46. The quotation is in V. I. Lenin, *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power*? in Collected Works, Vol. 26 [September 1917 - February 1918], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 119.

[18] V. I. Lenin, *Preface to the Russian Translation of Letters by Johannes Becker, Joseph Dietzgen, Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, and Others to Friedrich Sorge and Others*, in Collected Works, Vol. 12 [January – June 1907], Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 362.

[19] V. I. Lenin, *Marx on the American*. "*General Redistribution*", in Collected Works, Vol. 8, op. cit., p. 328.

of science»[20]. The removal of dialectics - in a context in which bourgeois science is nothing more than science that rewards the capital that supports and finances it - thus made it possible to better define the new relationship between capital and technical-scientific expertise and the forms of consciousness in which the apologetic vision of technocratic scientism was established, which also made it possible to skilfully conceal all forms of arbitrariness and subjectivism behind the notion of «scientificity». In this sense, Ilyenkov's philosophical proposal courageously aimed to stem all this, with a view to breaking a circularity that leads to definitive objectification, in which the dominance of capitalist-bourgeois ideology is perceived, i.e. in which it is understood that it does not only correspond to a system of production relations, but is also a way of thinking and representing reality, without, however, possessing the necessary tools to counter it.

In the polemical *Letter to the CPSU*[21], Ilyenkov warned academic and institutional leaders about the dangers of university education without a unified frame of reference, which, in his opinion, could only be provided by a rigorous education in dialectical materialism, as a logic and method for understanding and transforming reality, through knowledge of the history of philosophy, starting with ancient Greece[22] and moving on to Marx, Engels and Lenin, passing in particular through Spinoza and Hegel. Instead, in university faculties, young people were trained (as they are today) to acquire theoretical knowledge and technical-professional skills that were totally sectoral and specific, equipping them with a preparation that was completely ignorant of any historical and philosophical awareness. Physicists, engineers, doctors and jurists thus find themselves navigating the world without knowing the history that produced their respective knowledge, but above all without

[20] A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, ElecBook, London, 1971/1999, p. 811.

[21] On this point, please refer to Chapter 2: *Purpose and Meaning of Dialectical Materialism. On the state of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in a Letter to the CPSU*. However, there are conflicting theories as to whether this communication was actually sent and received by the Central Committee of the CPSU, and above all whether it was examined. In any case, it may be useful here to report how it concludes, and with what preliminary requests. Ilyenkov writes: «The current situation calls for immediate measures. Two in particular: 1) Reviving Lenin's conception of philosophy as a special science, namely materialist dialectics as the logic and theory of knowledge of modern materialism. A clear understanding of what, according to Lenin, philosophy must do as a special science in order not to turn into a mess, a vague sea of "modern methodological issues"; 2) Radical transformation of philosophical education. Before it is too late, it is necessary to bring together all the remaining dialectical materialist cadres, giving them the opportunity to train their replacements, linking materialist dialectics with the history of philosophy, i.e. with professional philosophical literacy, with those traditions through which Marx and Lenin developed philosophy.», E. Ilyenkov, *On the State of Philosophy [letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU]*, О положении с философией [Письмо в ЦК партии], Moscow, 2008, p. 387.

[22] Just like Lenin who, with formidable foresight, invited us to study and deepen «The History of Philosophy. Greek Philosophy indicated all these moments: the fields of knowledge from which the theory of knowledge and dialectics should be built», including «the psycology, the history of language, the history of cognition in general and the mental development of the child», V. I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in Collected Works, Vol. 38, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 351.

being able to relate their technical specialism to social, economic and institutional events on the basis of effective critical self-awareness.

Ilyenkov's actuality - in a system that now only needs good specialists rather than thinking individuals, and seeks to erase reason in order to replace it artificially - lies precisely in placing the relationship between the theory of knowledge, dialectics and practical activity, between the production and evolution of thought, between scientific achievements and their ideological use, back at the centre of reflection, and in the attempt to renew the urgency of a dialectical philosophy to be fully assimilated in order to allow everyone to conceptually master reality and its contradictions, knowing full well that knowledge is never neutral, but always an expression of the ruling class, and that one is a *subject* of this world only if «*is able to contain and support its own contradiction*»[23]. And all this with Hegel, Marx, Engels, Lenin. And with Ilyenkov, whose tragic fate was in many ways marked precisely by that awareness, entirely *materialistic and dialectical*, that it is not enough to equip oneself with a correct theory if, in practice, its contents are then casually betrayed.

[23] G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830) *Philosophy of Nature*, Vol. III. Edited and translated, with Introduction and Explanatory Notes by M. J. Petry. London-New York: Allen & Unwin, 1970, § 359 R. [*Enzyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), GW, Bd. 20, hrsg. von W. Bonspien u. H.-C. Lucas, unter mitarbeit von U. Rameil, 1992, § 359 An.].